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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [LH](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INITIAL MEETING WITH FOREIGN-AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE CHAIR

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The chairman of the parliamentary committee on foreign affairs told Ambassador Derse that Lithuania remains committed to development efforts and its PRT leadership in Afghanistan's Ghor Province, despite financial straitQd difficulties in attracting foreign donors. He also obliquely criticized President Dalia Grybauskaite for her unwillingness to permit resettlement of any Guantanamo detainees in Lithuania, and for "reckless statements" that have fueled media speculation about an alleged CIA prison in the country. He spoke enthusiastically about Lithuania's plans to help Moldova and Belarus along the path to democracy, but was much more pessimistic about relations with Russia. He said that all of Lithuania's major political parties are united in their support for a strong relationship with the United States. End summary.

Afghanistan  
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¶2. (C) The Ambassador met November 23 with Audronius Azubalis, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Seimas (parliament) and discussed a wide range of topics. She thanked Azubalis for the Seimas' vote last week to extend the mandate of Lithuanian troops in Afghanistan, and for all the support Lithuania has provided for the mission in Afghanistan. Azubalis said that Lithuania has had to limit its participation because of financial constraints, but was committed to fulfilling its work in Afghanistan. He said that the GOL has had great difficulty finding international donors for development projects in Ghor, and mused that Arab and Muslim countries ought to be providing more aid. He was pleased when the Ambassador said that the United States would be sending a full-time agricultural specialist to Ghor Province.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador said she had observed personally that Ghor was relatively stable, praising the work of the Lithuanian forces there. She told Azubalis that Washington colleagues recognized and appreciated the Lithuanians work in Afghanistan, particularly under such difficult financial constraints.

Bilateral relationship  
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¶4. (C) Azubalis said that although Lithuania's political parties often clashed, "we always cooperated very well... on relations with the United States." Whether under the current Conservative government or the Social Democrats, now in opposition, "I think an absolute majority of the members of our parliament are in favor'' of a strong relationship. "I see no difference between Social Democratic leaders and ours in understanding how vital is cooperation in both the bilateral and multilateral framework," said Azubalis, a Conservative.

Jewish issues  
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15. (C) Azubalis said that there always would be some issues on which Lithuanian parliamentarians did not see eye to eye with the United States, but categorized them as minor. He cited restitution of Jewish communal property as an example, but also said that he believed the Seimas would resolve the issue within the next few months. "It's a very delicate issue. The problems are in public perception rather than in political will." He said the prospect of hostile media coverage, as well as an opinion from Seimas lawyers that said the compensation bill could be unconstitutional, as roadblocks. He also said that passing a bill that would pay millions of dollars in compensation while pensions and other benefits are being slashed would be difficult. "Maybe we should do it later, and in a precise manner that leaves no doubt that it is being done in accordance with the constitution."

16. (C) The Ambassador said she understood the sensitivity of the issue, especially in a time of economic crisis, "but stressed the importance of resolving the longstanding issue of property restitution."

17. (C) Azubalis said Lithuanian-Jewish relations also have suffered because of perceived differences over evaluations of the Holocaust. "We're pushing toward an evaluation of totalitarian, Communist regimes, the crimes of which should be evaluated, as the crimes of Nazism are evaluated he said. But he made clear this does not mean "equating" the two. Many Jewish people argue that there is no comparison between the crimes of Stalin and Hitler, and that the effort to evaluate Stalinism is an attempt to diminish the importance of the Holocaust, he noted. "It's absurd that we're trying to

undermine the uniqueness of the Holocaust. We're not. The crimes have one common thing -- that they are crimes, and should be exposed and condemned."

#### NATO and Russia -----

18. (C) Azubalis said the Seimas was following with great interest the creation of a new strategic concept and has contributed views. The Ambassador said that discussion of a new strategic concept for NATO would best be done quietly and through NATO channels, rather than through public pronouncements. Azubalis agreed.

19. (C) Azubalis said Lithuania sometimes felt exposed. "We are here on the periphery of the EU and NATO. From both sides, we must be prepared for any provocation or unfriendly action." Such actions, he said, are not only military. He talked about unfavorable trade actions that Russia has taken recently, such as hampering entry into Russia of Lithuanian trucks and banning the import of many Lithuanian dairy products. He said Lithuania was pushing the creation of an EU structure that would be able to react quickly to trade sanctions, because it currently takes about 15 months for the EU to take responsive measures.

110. (C) The Ambassador told Azubalis that the U.S. approach on resetting the relationship with Russia did not involve costs to countries such as Lithuania. She said the United States believed it could work with Russia on some issues on which we share interests, such as Iran and Afghanistan, while recognizing that there remain areas of difference. She said the United States would not accede to Russia's claim of having an exclusive sphere of influence, and supports the sovereignty and independence of countries on Russia's periphery, such as Georgia and Lithuania.

111. (C) Azubalis responded, "I'm a pessimist on that. I saw what kind of hopes they (the Bush, Clinton and Bush administrations) came in with on Russia, and I wish the new administration the best. But the Russians can talk with you, drink with you, dance with you, but they always go back in the end to their own way." He said he was a realist when

looking at the relationship between Russia and Lithuania. "Our business, our market are very small for them. They don't need us. I wish we could talk about equality and respect. At least we should have good will, but I see a shortage in Russia. There is no good will." In fact, Azubalis said, Russia seems to be going backwards. He cited the example of Viktor Ozerov, chairman of the Security and Defense Committee of the Russian Federation Council, the upper house of the Duma, whom he had just seen at A NATO Parliamentary Assembly meeting: "I've known him for 18 years. Before, he was open and friendly, and now he has changed. He is closed, angry, tense." Azubalis said NATO's Parliamentary Assembly -- in which he is chairman of the Lithuanian delegation -- has been the only international body not to have restored full relations with Russia after the Russia-Georgia war of August 2008. He praised the members of the NATO PA, but lamented that all other organizations are "back to business as usual."

#### The neighborhood

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¶12. (C) Azubalis said Lithuania was well-positioned to assist former Soviet republics such as Moldova and Belarus in their transition to democracy. "We have good experts -- maybe dull, but knowledgeable -- who can tell them what can be and should be done." He said Lithuania, IRI and the Warsaw-based secretariat of the Community of Democracies, which Lithuania currently chairs, plan to design training sessions for members of the Moldovan parliament.

¶13. (C) Members of the EU hold a variety of views on whether sanctions on Belarus should continue, Azubalis said. Countries such as Germany, a large creditor, would like to ease or remove sanctions, he said, while others like the Netherlands, because of the importance they place on human rights, want sanctions to remain in place. "We're someplace in the middle," he said of Lithuania. "We want creation of a roadmap, but each step should be clarified" so that benchmarks are reached before sanctions are ended. "Otherwise, it's very easy to speculate and say there is progress, when really there isn't."

#### Guantanamo detainees

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¶14. (C) Azubalis was apologetic that Lithuania has not been able to accept one or two detainees from Guantanamo, even though the government had said last spring that it was

willing to do so. "I'm always saying each politician should be ready to take responsibility for his own words. I think it's important to fulfill our promises. I hope there is understanding that the government is ready to do this, but misunderstanding that some branches of our state have" about what a prisoner transfer would mean for Lithuania had blocked progress, he said, in an apparent reference to President Grybauskaitė. He also suggested that the United States ask other allies to approach Grybauskaitė. "It would be good to get some encouragement from other European countries that are willing to share" this burden. "I hope after some time, some way, we will find a solution."

¶15. (C) Azubalis again obliquely criticized Grybauskaitė, when he raised allegations of existence of a CIA prison in Lithuania. In an October 20 press conference, he noted, after the initial furor over the media reports had died down, the president said she suspected the reports about the prison might be true, and urged a full investigation. Azubalis said the foreign-affairs committee had first discussed the issue, quietly, in 2006. "Reckless statements can cause harm. This is now growing like a snowball." He said he was confident there is no truth to the allegations and he hoped the parliamentary committee would finish its investigation quickly.

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